DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 388 FL 009 570

AUTHOR Salzmann, Herbert
TITLE Writing as Self-Discovery: Teaching Writing Skills to Non-Native Speakers. TEAL Occasional Papers, Vol. 2, 1978.
INSTITUTION British Columbia Association of Teachers of English as an Additional Language, Vancouver.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM Maureen C. Sawkins, British Columbia Association of TEAL, c/o King Edward Campus, V.C.C., 2750 Oak St., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada ($2.50 Canadian plus $.50 postage)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Composition Skills (Literary); *English (Second Language); *Error Analysis (Language); *Language Instruction; Personal Interests; Second Language Learning; *Self Expression; Writing Exercises; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A method of teaching writing to adult students of English as a second language is presented. The method emphasizes the first-person point of view. For an individual in a new culture with limited vocabulary and uncertain knowledge of structure, beginning with the self and observed events can be reassuring. With this method, described as being a self-discovery, the student is given an assignment of correcting his writing errors, guided by a handout sheet of correction symbols. Students may be requested to work on improving incorrect structures or providing information missing from the writing. Students also work on dividing the writing into paragraphs. The method is demonstrated by providing an example of student writing. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED157388

WRITING AS SELF-DISCOVERY: TEACHING WRITING SKILLS TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Herbert Salzmann

Herbert Salzmann teaches English as a Second Language at King Edward Campus V.C.C. He has taught English at the Secondary and post-secondary level. He is a Second Language learner himself having grown up in Germany. His native background is German and Belgian.

Writing for the majority of English speakers is not a divinely-given talent but an acquired skill rarely exercised except in the forms of letters, memos, notes, outlines -- in other words, forms coming closest to the conversational, colloquial language. This type of writing is the norm for the native speaker and he seldom uses writing as a means of self-discovery or as a pleasurable craft. The same holds true for the Adult Second Language Learner. But, unlike the native speaker, he is faced with becoming proficient in the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. (Structure cannot be deemed a separate skill but an integral one of the spoken and written form.) In the majority of cases, he does not, regardless of the educational level he achieved in his own country or the type of profession he was engaged in, have the luxury or dubious privilege of ignoring the written form in the Second Language or using it as sparingly as possible. For him there is often an intense, time-compressed study of writing English and whether he likes it or not, Second Language learning will no doubt involve more writing than he has ever done in his first language and more than he will agreeably digest.

I therefore firmly believe writing must, for the Adult Second Language Learner at the Advanced Level, not only enlarge his vocabulary, secure his grip on sentence structure, tenses, idioms, punctuation and paragraph division, but also lead to one important end: self-discovery in the Second Language. By self-discovery I mean the emphasis must pri-

FL009570

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Maureen Sawkins

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

marily be on the self, the first person point of view. In a new culture it is reassuring to begin with the self and observed events. The source must be the "I".

The Second Language learner, struggling with a limited vocabulary and uncertain knowledge of structure, must be given the freedom and help to stretch himself in the Second Language, to release himself both emotionally and intellectually. Journals (letter writing if so desired) and the simple narrative form encourage this and take some of the stiffness out of Second Language writing. These types of writing can effectively present genuine experiences of people and events. They are usually short, uncomplicated accounts of events set down in natural time-order. They differ from the strict narrative essay in that the latter emphasizes an idea and tells its story in order to demonstrate that idea. Journals, letter writing and simple narrative writing invite the reader to share the happenings. For example, they can present the experience itself, ending simply and completely with the final occurrence in a chain of events: the end of a day, of a trip, the parting of friends, the completion of a job. The forms generally use the "I" view point and (except for formal letters) need little or no formal instructions from the teacher.

The objection may be raised "but this is not writing but conversation!" If one means that acquiring writing skills means the student must distance himself from the writing, must allow it to speak for itself, must use the pedantic "one", must abstract any subjective, personal note, must scrupulously observe the niceties of essay style, must be aware of tone, diction, textual evidence, specialized vocabulary and eloquence, then this is not teaching writing skills in a conventional sense. And if it means one must help him manipulate the theme, the style, the structure and vocabulary of Shirley Jackson or Jack London, then yes, this is not teaching writing skills.

I am not advocating that controlled composition does not have its merits but it does have its drawbacks. From past experience, I know the difficulties the student has, in trying to write within a prescribed structure. The vocabulary and structure he uses are primarily derived from the model writing and that is fine; it fulfills the purpose of controlled writing. But the exercise is extremely restrictive and mechanical. Frequently, the student attempts to personalize the writing in terms of his moral and material values, life style and human relationships (something which is encouraged in Self-Discovery writing.) Yet he never captures the theme, the irony or the style of the model writer. But, then, he is asked to manipulate someone's style and content, a difficult task for a native speaker, an almost impossible one for the non-native speaker. It is analogous to the teacher asking the Second Language student to give him an example of a sentence with a noun clause functioning as an appositive. Meaning is subordinated to grammatical knowledge. Emulating another's writing subordinates or suppresses self-expression and awareness.

And if this type of writing advocated here, is judged as approximating conversation, it is still writing and can be designated as good conversation and as effective writing. Writing will always be more mechanical, less spontaneous. Just the simple act of picking up a pen and taking out a sheet of paper imposes a prescribed procedure. Part of the student's writing task is to compensate for the lack of face to face contact with its wealth of paralinguistic features. Writing practice, also, unlike conversation, enforces a logical sequence, a deletion of the "You Knows", the "Hahs", the awkward pauses, the needless repetitions and the fragments. Ironically, these characteristics of conversation, if given by a Second Language learner, should be positively acknowledged, but rejected, if given by a native speaker.

Whereas in a native speaker's composition, repetition, cliches, banal sayings, verbosity and slang are criticized, in a non-native speaker's composition, they should be welcomed and analyzed as exploring the new language. That is not to say, they should remain in his writing; they should, if desirable, be extracted and digested by the student as perhaps new vocabulary, idioms or structures. Nothing is too insignificant in acquiring a new language and if it means overlapping of skills or violation of set writing forms, then one makes the necessary adaptations. A dual system must be constantly maintained. A native speaker's usage of "etc." may be deemed either laziness or discriminating brevity. But a Second Language learner's liberal usage of "etc." symbolizes an inadequate vocabulary. The ELT teacher in teaching writing skills must enforce this "awareness" in himself and the ELT student in learning writing skills must enforce "self-awareness" in himself.

The method outlined on the following pages involves these objectives:

the student informs himself and the reader

the student informs himself of structures, idioms, vocabulary, tenses, punctuation, paragraphs

the student extracts prose types - topics - from his own writing; i.e. they are not imposed but exposed.

Steps in Writing as Self-Discovery

Each student has a writing folder. This folder contains a hand-out sheet with a set of correction symbols and their explanations (the correction symbols focus on Second Language Learner's errors). Included will also be a punctuation sheet and a sheet with co-ordinate, subordinate conjunctions, as well as a list of common adverbial transitions: e.g. however, nevertheless, etc. Most important of all, there is a list of topics for those who suffer from the chronic complaint "I have not a thought in my head." I personally am using a set of 200 questions lifted from a questionnaire designed to

assess one's personality. The set is appropriate for eliciting the types of writings mentioned and the "I" view point. The folder must be brought to class. If writing is not assigned as homework, set aside twenty minutes for writing at the beginning of class. Collect writing every week or two weeks.

At home give the writing a thorough analysis as illustrated in the "Example of a Student's Writing." Put in appropriate correction symbols. Pose two sets of questions if necessary: One set (A) includes structures incorrectly used by the student and vocabulary not in his possession; the other set (B) asks about information missing from the writing. If the writing cannot be fruitfully enlarged and thus allow the student to extract a different prose type or a hidden topic, present him with only question set (A). Question set (A) should also reflect the student's sentence structure and not needlessly introduce unfamiliar and confusing structures. Also, the ordering of the questions can aid the student in logically arranging his writing.

Have one day of the week set aside as a writing workshop. The student with his sheet of correction symbols beside him (the other handouts too) attempts to correct the errors by writing the corrections above the incorrect ones. He brings you his corrections for a check. Those errors he cannot correct have him ignore for they will be given to him in question set (A). Then he goes back and rewrites with the aid of question set (A) his composition. He brings it to you for a check. Depending on the student, sometimes there will be no question set, one question set - either (A) or (B), or both.

If question set (B) is required, then after the student has written his composition with the missing information included, a third question set (C) on idea patterns (chronology, listing, etc.) may be given. Question set (C) can help the student divide his writing into paragraphs. This

question set can be discussed with the student or presented in written form. These various steps must, of course, be supplemented by classroom demonstrations and handouts.

Example of Student's Writing: Method Demonstrated

Due to my wrong ability in English speaking it happened to me a few interesting incidents when I travelled in the states.

A few years ago I decided to take some time travelling during the Spring as it appears a pretty season.

As it was very cool and even freezing in Quebec, I decided to go in the states.

It was around Easter so I thought it would be very nice and interesting to stop in New York and be present at the parade and gaze at the ridiculous hats on the Fifth Avenue. So I took the train from a very small city, absolutely lost in the country.

First of all, I thought I was dreaming in waiting to get in it. It appeared to me coming directly from a museum. This train had very uncomfortable wooden seats and the journey seemed to last forever.

In France we were not any more used to this kind of "model", it's not exactly the "Mistral" probably its ancestor!

Loaded for the circumstances, I dropped myself on the first seat available. I was squeezed between two healtny middle-aged women who could not stop talking and arguing about everything.

I would not have said any word as I felt insecure. But at the departure everyone started to feel at home. I could not believe it, the windows served as a private wardrobe with hangers all over the place for the Easter dresses in order to prevent wrinkles. So we could enjoy the waving of the dresses decorating all the windows available in the wagon.

I would not have minded except the light was not anymore very good, and my hearing for understanding English much worse. I was at the wrong side of the signs. So at every station it was a real exercise trying to catch something at the window in order to see where I was arriving. I heard something resembling at New York.

I jumped out as I didn't want to miss my station. I didn't, in fact it was a few hours ahead. I was in Newark. It took me a long time to reach my destination as the next one was due six hours later.

With a headache and an empty stomach, I got to New York in the middle of the night and realized the last stop was at the Grand Centre in New York.

Jacqueline Leloup

Clarification of Terminology Included in Question Set (A)

"Wrong ability in English speaking": listening and spelling problems.

"Small city, absolutely lost in the country.": Small city located deep in the heart of the Quebec countryside.

"Loaded for the circumstances": burdened down by the luggage I thought I needed.

"Trying to catch something at the window": trying to decipher or to read the names of the places where we stopped.

"I heard something resembling at New York": I heard something that sounded like New York.

"at the wrong side of the signs": my window did not face the side of the railway stations we passed.

"wagon": passenger carriage

"waving": fluttering

"I jumped out": I quickly got off the train

Structural Problems Included in Question Set (A)

"it happened to me a few interesting incidents": double subject: a few interesting incidents happened to me.

"the Spring, the Fifth Avenue": article misuse.

"in the states": prepositional misuse "from" a very small city

"in waiting to get in it": time conjunction, preposition misuse, while waiting to get on it.

"In France we were not anymore used to this kind of model": tense error (habitual) incorrect word order - In France we are not used to this kind of model anymore.

"The light was not anymore very good": Word order, The light was not very good anymore.

"my hearing for understanding English": misuse of gerund - my ability to understand the pronounciation of English words.

"a few hours ahead": misuse of preposition - a few hours short of my destination.

"It took me a long time to reach my destination as the next one was due six hours later": faulty pronoun reference and misuse to due. It took me a long time to reach my destination as the next train was not due until six hours later or it took me a long time to reach my destination as it was a six hour ride away from Newark.

"at the Grand Centre in New York": preposition misuse, article misuse: Grand Central Station.

Question Set (A)

A few years ago, did you decide to spend some time travelling in the States because it was spring time and very cool and even freezing in Quebec?

While you were travelling in the States, did you have a few amusing experiences because of your listening and spelling problems in English?

So, did you board the train in a small city located deep in the heart of the Quebec countryside?

First of all, did you think you were dreaming while waiting to get on it?

In France are you not used to this kind of model anymore?

Burdened down by the luggage you thought you needed, did you quickly lower yourself on the first seat?

Would you not have said anything as you felt insecure?

Did everyone at departure time start to feel at home and did you too?

Did you enjoy the fluttering of the dresses decorating all the available windows in the passenger carriage?

Would you not have minded if it had not been for the poor lighting and for your poor ability to understand the pronounciation of English words?

Was your window not facing the side of the railway stations you passed?

Thus was it a great strain trying to decipher or to read the names of the places where you stopped?

Did you hear something that sounded like New York?

Did you quickly get off the train because you did not want to miss your station?

Did it take you a long time to reach your destination as the next train was not due until six hours later? or Did it take you a long time to reach your destination as it was a six-hour ride away from Newark?

Did you realize that your last stop was Grand Central Station in New York?

Question Set (B)

What is your ethnic and linguistic background?

What was your place of residence in Quebec?

How long had you been in Canada at the time? and How long had you been studying English?

What is the name of the small city where you boarded the train and where is it situated?

What type of parade did you want to see?

Why did you find the Easter hats and dresses amusing? Do you still?

Why did the train strike you as a museum piece?

What was the inside of the train like?

What type of luggage burdened you down?

In what kind of physical shape were you when you sat down or rather sank down gratefully on the train seat?

What did the two middle-aged women look like?

How did they react to you when you squeezed in between them?

Could you understand snatches of their conversation?

Who went about hanging up dresses in front of the window?

Were these old-fashioned dresses?

Did you find them ridiculous?

How did the people make themselves at home?

What did you do when you found yourself in Newark?

Who told you you were in the wrong place?

Within these questions are terms and structures the students can make use of.

The Idea Patterns Embodied in this Narrative: Included in teacher's analysis

- Chronological arrangement:	month, year, time of departure, day arrival at Newark, arrival at New York
- Spatial arrangement:	location of small city in Quebec, interior of the train, location of her seat - relation of her side or railway stations
- Cause and effect:	listening and spelling ability, night time, wrong side of seat, dresses hanging on the windows
- Comparison - contrast:	Quebec - States - Climate Jacqueline's feelings - people on the train, celebration of Easter in States, New York to France, appearance of train and French trains.

Question Set (C) - Can be done orally with student

What is in time order? What is not?

What are you comparing and contrasting?

What cause and effect relationship do you have?

What spatial relations do you have?

What are you listing?

The result paragraph division: student notes down 4 paragraph possibilities:

1st - place time, reason place of departure	2nd - reaction to train problem interior of train
3rd - reaction to people difficulty of seeing signs	4th - wrong place misunderstanding arrival at correct destination

It must be noted that Question Set (C) does not always follow Question Set (B). Depending on the content and length of the piece of writing, for example in the above Question Set (C)

can be the next step after Question Set (A). The norm, however, is usually a short piece of writing requiring self correction and rewriting with the aid of Question Set (A).

Prose Types Embodied in this Narrative: Part of teacher's analysis

1. Informative:
   a. Who is it: Jacqueline Leloup
   b. Why was it done: curiousity, spring season, cold climate in Quebec
   c. How was it done: by train
   d. What was it: problem - poor listening ability, ignorance of the spelling of the word New York
2. Descriptive Writing:
   a. Describing people: Jacqueline, other people on the train, two middle-aged women, conductor
   b. Describing places: train stations, train outside--inside

Impressionistic Description: Humour

I. reaction to train
II. anticipation of Easter parade, hats
III. acquaintance with people on the train
IV. neck craning, dresses covering windows

Hidden Topic: Comparing French trains to American ones

At this point, the teacher and the student can decide on which prose type to extract: e.g. descriptive, humourous one. Admittedly, in Jacqueline's paper the types are an integral part of the whole narrative and thus it would be unnecessarily redundant to have the student extract the types. Here it is better to work on it in context. The hidden topic is the appropriate choice here. Comparing French trains to American ones will be factual, informative, descriptive. The teacher may want the student to stress the factual more than the other two. He should thus pose this question to the student when discussing the new composition: Can tastes, values,

opinions, generalizations be tested and checked to be true and false like facts: If descriptive writing is emphasized, pose this question: What appeals to the sense of sight? taste? hearing? smell? touch? The point is -- the diagnosis you give the student's writing will determine the amount of work he has to do on it. Jacqueline's narrative is a rich source and lends itself to a number of follow-up activities. Another student's writing may only have one possibility or more. But regardless of the nature of the source, the student does not work in isolation. His writing activities are brought out from the inside and not from the outside.